

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07

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USIA-15 IO-10 SAM-01 SAB-01 /088 W

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R 141554Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1338

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

UNCLAS BEIRUT 13669

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJ: INTERVIEW WITH ELF SEC GEN

REF: BEIRUT'S 12396 AND PREVIOUS

1. ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT (ELF) SEC GEN OTHMAN BEN SALEH, IN INTERVIEW PUBLISHED NOV 13 IN BEIRUT WEEKLY AS SAYYAD, REITERATED SUBSTANCE OF EARLIER ELF STATEMENTS ISSUED HERE (REFTELS)--I.E., ELF WILLINGNESS TO NEGOTIATE WITH ETHIOPIA BUT ONLY AFTER LATTER RECOGNIZES ERITREA'S RIGHT TO INDEPENDENCE, AND ELF APPEALS FOR ARAB SUPPORT IN ORDER "PRESSURE ETHIOPIAN GOVT AND REALIZE BY FORCE WHAT (IS NOT ACHIEVED) BY POLITICAL MEANS." SALEH SAID ARAB SUPPORT "IS LESS THAN WHAT WE NEED, BUT MORE THAN WE EXPECTED." HE SPECIFICALLY THANKED SUDAN, EGYPT, LIBYA, ALGERIA, SAUDI ARABIA, SOUTH YEMEN, IRAQ AND KUWAIT FOR THEIR SUPPORT.

2. OF MORE IMPORT WAS SALEH'S CLAIM THAT ELF NOW CONTROLS
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ENTIRE ERITREAN COUNTRYSIDE AND NOW PLANS "NEXT PHASE,...

LIBERATION OF TOWNS." HE ADMITTED FIGHTING WOULD COST THOUSANDS OF LIVES, BUT HOPED "OCCUPIERS" WOULD EVACUATE ERITREA BEFORE PLAN BECOMES OPERATIVE.

3. SALEH CRITICIZED LACK OF PUBLICITY INTERNATIONAL PRESS GIVING ELF AFTER 13 YEARS OF FIGHTING, BUT ADDED "THERE IS MUCH SHORTER AND QUICK WAY TO GRAB HEADLINES." HE NOTED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT ELF COULD USE ERITREAN ISLANDS AND COASTLINE TO CLOSE BAB EL-MANDAB STRAIT TO MILITARY AND COMMERCIAL SHIPPING OF "HOSTILE" COUNTRIES SUCH AS US AND ISRAEL. HE SAID THIS TACTIC COULD BE IMPLEMENTED AT ANY TIME AND BE USED REPEATEDLY "NO MATTER HOW WELL GUARDED THE SHIPPING IS." HE ADDED: "AT APPROPRIATE POLITICAL MOMENT--APPROPRIATE FOR US AND FOR OUR ARAB BROTHERS--ELF WILL NOT HESITATE TO STRIKE AT ZIONIST AND AMERICAN NAVIES IN RED SEA." IN CONCLUDING, SALEH ASKED "OUR ARAB BROTHERS TO UNDERSTAND OUR CIRCUMSTANCES IF WE ARE FORCED TO (CLOSE BAB EL-MANDAB STRAIT) BECAUSE OUR CAUSE CONTINUES TO BE NEGLECTED."
GODLEY

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NNN

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